

## 1. **Staying Connected – The Influence of Internal Communication on the Company Culture**

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### **Why should startups deal with internal communication at all?**

**Maria** · The days when internal communication was just about sending out a monthly newsletter and publishing a portrait of the CEO are long gone. Internal communication managers are no longer “just” order-takers when it comes to communication. In a world that is constantly evolving, internal communications managers are becoming key players in attracting and retaining employees and fostering a culture that both supports the strategic side of the business and engages employees.

### **Has the pandemic increased the importance of internal communication? And if so, to what extent?**

**Maria** · In my opinion, yes, massively! Whether we are talking about corporations, scale-ups or start-ups, internal communication is extremely important in times of uncertainty and volatility in the market.

**How do you work together in a time characterised by uncertainty, social and economic instability and rapid technological progress?** Companies need to rethink how to attract, retain, motivate employees and at the same time foster a culture that aligns with the ‘new normal’ post-covid, where new working models pop up left and right. This is where internal communication can be a valuable driver and resource for companies as it bridges the gap between business needs and employee behaviors by providing the right information and communication formats that connect employees to the organization, regardless of location or work setup.

### **Is internal communication a case for the HR department or for the communication department?**

**Maria** · Every organization is different. Positioning internal communications as part of the HR or communications department depends to some extent on the company's size, maturity and industry – in a startup you may end up doing a bit of both. Since internal communication is about the people and covers organizational matters, too, Internal Communications should be working closely with the HR department. At the same time, external and internal communication should always be aligned to ensure that the brand message remains consistent and information is shared in a timely manner; what the company does externally should be reflected internally and vice versa. If there is no coherence between internal and external communication, the company brand and identity will seem inconsistent and incoherent, which is confusing, unreliable and creates mistrust and demotivation among the employees – a company culture's worst enemy!

### **Internal communication is not just about sharing important information. Rather, it's about motivating employees, retaining them and giving them a sense of ‘we’. How can this be achieved?**

There is no size fits all when it comes to employee engagement. Every organization and its employees are different, but there are some best practices that I am happy to share.

First, find out more about your target group, i.e. your employees. This can be done through surveys, focus interviews and, of course, informal conversations and listening. In this way, you will get a sense of who would be good strategic sparring partners for you and the management level are. Who is a good multiplier? Who is particularly valued by the staff?

Second, since the advent of social media, one-way communication is dead. People can now express their opinions online instantly, and they do. Don't be afraid to involve staff. Often this is the best content!

Third, it is important to be close to staff and actively involve them in communication whenever possible. I listen a lot in my daily work, monitor and measure my communication activities closely; I do more of what works well; stop doing what doesn't work; I pause and reflect on the data I gather through my initiatives and evaluate all this on a monthly basis.

Moreover, from my point of view, content created by employees themselves is the best way to get them interested and excited about the company.

Fourth, it is important to have a central place for important communication, a “source of truth”. This is an important basis for

ensuring that all employees have the same level of information. Another important, fifth aspect of internal communication is to ensure that employees understand the overall strategy and purpose of the company and how they can make a positive impact on the company.

One way I recommend doing this is to write stories where you give credit to the team or the person who has done a great job, by highlighting how this particular achievement plays into the bigger picture; the business objectives that is.

Last: regularly consult with key stakeholders – formally or informally. Are they satisfied, are they missing something? Feedback loops and a constant exchange are a good way to grasp the current state of the company and to take countermeasures if necessary. It is also easier to find interesting company stories if you are in contact with the company's internal opinion leaders.